

Preface by the Secretary General

In 2007, two new Council of Europe buildings were commissioned in Strasbourg: a new General Office Building and a purpose-built home for the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and HealthCare. These two new buildings brought the total floor space occupied by the Council of Europe to more than 200 000 square metres. That is a lot of room by anyone's reckoning, and it takes many people to fill it. And it begs the question "What do all those people do?" The short answer is a very great deal. In the pages which follow, we offer a more detailed account of what we did indeed do during the last year.

By way of introduction to this annual report, I have the proud but slightly invidious duty of pointing to a few highlights of the year. Proud because I applaud the very many people – staff, representatives of member states, experts, parliamentarians, elected local officials, NGO and civil society activists – who come together in the Council of Europe to help us in our mission. Invidious because to single out some achievements is to leave out many more. What I offer here is a taster, in the hope that it will encourage you to read further.

So what do we have to show for the year just passed?

To start with, we have significantly reinforced our arsenal of legally binding instruments. The Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings has finally reached the threshold of ratifications and will enter into force in early 2008. In October 2007, a new Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse was opened for signature. These two conventions, together with the Convention on Cybercrime of 2001 and the two anti-terrorist conventions approved by the Council of Europe heads of state and government on the occasion of the Third Council of Europe Summit in 2005, of which one entered into force in June 2007, represent the new generation of Council of Europe legal instruments.

These instruments deal with some of the most pressing challenges that Europe faces today and introduce cutting-edge, innovative and effective measures to facilitate international co-operation and action at national level. It is also significant that they are open to non-European countries and therefore offer global solutions to global problems. Given the issues with which they deal – trafficking, sexual exploitation of children, cybercrime and terrorism – this open-ended character is extremely important.

These conventions all bear the very distinctive Council of Europe mark – combining measures for forceful and effective international legal co-operation with specific safeguards for human rights based on the European Convention on Human Rights. With this new generation of treaties, the Council of Europe is making an important, distinctive and unparalleled contribution to the European legal space, by which I mean a system of legal norms applicable to the whole of Europe and based on the Council of Europe values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In the past year we also made progress in reinforcing and clarifying our relationship with other European institutions, starting with the European Union, but also our partners in the OSCE and the United Nations. A Memorandum of Understanding with the European Union now provides a formal framework for co-operation between the EU and the Council of Europe on the basis of our respective mandates and comparative advantages.

Important as it is, our relationship with the European Union is only one facet of the increasing relevance and influence of the Council of Europe. The development of our White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the inauguration of annual Council of Europe meetings on the

religious dimension of such dialogue, the first of which took place under the San Marino chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in April, are examples of the strategic tools which we are putting at the disposal of member states as they address key societal issues. So too are the recommendations of the High-Level Social Policy Task Force in its report "Towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe". In May we saw the creation of a new mechanism for establishing international standards in sport: the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, to which 23 states have already adhered. In the same month, the London Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process assigned to the Council of Europe a pivotal role in the development of national qualification frameworks, themselves key to freedom of movement in higher education, whilst wider freedom of movement and cultural exchange is enjoyed by the many people who now travel the 24 cultural routes we have helped to establish. I believe that we are well on the way to becoming a genuine generator of social progress and change – across the whole of Europe and beyond.

At the same time, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities continue to snap at the heels of complacency – reminding us, that the Council of Europe is not a club of perfect democracies, and that our mission remains very much a work-in-progress.

In 2007, we also added welcome strength to our Organisation as a public advocate of our European values. The designation of 10 October as the European Day against the Death Penalty typifies the extension of our reach. Our campaigning began to take on a new dimension, combining public awareness and attitude changing through media activities with policy initiatives. The Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence and the Dosta! (a Romani word meaning "Enough!") campaign to eliminate stereotyping and prejudice were noted successes, the former producing materials in 24 languages and TV and radio coverage in 32 countries, the second proving such a success in the Western Balkans that plans are now in hand to roll it out further.

These campaigns and increased efforts to combine substance – which has always been our strength – with better and more efficient communication about our work are bringing about an increasing interest in our work by governments, civil society, the media and the public. If you are reading this annual report for the first time, you are perhaps the living proof of this development.

I promised earlier only a taster, an encouragement to read on further. As you do so, you will come across much that I have left out: the work of the European Court of Human Rights and much more on both the breadth and the focus of our activities. Whether you dip in or read cover to cover, I believe you will be convinced that the Council of Europe continues to make a difference, and to achieve progress in human rights, democracy and the rule of law across the continent.

Terry Davis

Secretary General of the Council of Europe